

Creating Margin In Our Lives¹ by Dwight Hill and Brian Thatcher

Thirty-Seven point four percent (37.4%) of the space on this sheet of paper is margin. You wouldn't read this if the print ran to the edges of the paper because it would offend your sense of proportion. In similar fashion, our lives also need margin. They need proportion.

Margin is:

The gap between rest and exhaustion...

The leeway we once had between ourselves and our limits...

Something held in reserve for contingencies or unanticipated situations...

Contrast Marginless and Margin:

Marginless is hurry...Margin is calm.

Marginless is anxiety...Margin is security.

Marginless is the culture...Margin is the counterculture.

Marginless is the disease of today...Margin is the cure.

If you are running thin on margin these days, my guess is you are on overload in at least some of the following areas.

Too many commitments.

Too much competition.

Too much debt.

Too many expectations.

Too much ministry.

My father ran a gas station for 25 years in a small rural town of 6,000. As a kid of 12, I pumped the gas on Saturdays as my older brother and my dad did the more sophisticated stuff like repairing engines. That's where I learned about the red blinking lights, called idiot lights, on the dashboards of automobiles. Only idiots continued to drive their cars once the red light(s) started to flash. If they continued to drive, their engines would seize up. We didn't mind if we had a whole town full of idiots; it was good for business!

A few months ago a dear friend of mine stated to me, "You're sick and you don't know it." I said "Oh really?" I could not get the statement out of my mind. Finally the comment worked its way through my self-denial. "What idiot lights are flashing on my emotional dashboard?" I thought. To ignore those red-blinking lights is to invite a significant "personal engine repair." But how do I identify the idiot lights?

Here's a start. Note if you have too much: Hunger Anger Lust Tiredness

If you find an increasing frequency of these destructive elements in your life, call a HALT. "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it." Prov 27:12

¹ The quotes and most of the ideas are drawn from Dr. R.A. Swenson's book Margin, published by NavPress.

Here are six steps we can take to ensure margin is built into our lives:

1. Learn to expect the unexpected. Because most everything takes longer than anticipated, learn to build margin into your planning.
2. Learn to say no. Contrary to your perception, you are not indispensable.
3. Cut down on activities, as they have a way of self-perpetuating; of multiplying.
4. Practice simplicity and contentment. Choose to live with less.
5. Get less done but do the right things. Assess all your activities for their spiritual authenticity.
6. Decide to live the life of Jesus whatever the cost:
"Let your sweet reasonableness, your forbearance, your being satisfied with less than your due, become known to all men... Stop worrying about even one thing, but in everything... let your requests... be made known in the presence of God, and the peace God ... shall mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:4-6 Wuest Translation)

Questions

1. If your life schedule was written on a piece of paper what percentage would be white space margin?
2. Check which category (or categories) best describes you.
 - ☐ Too many commitments.
 - ☐ Too much competition.
 - ☐ Too much debt.
 - ☐ Too many expectations.
 - ☐ Too much ministry.

In which category above do you have margin?

How do you feel when you think about the category in which you have margin and how do you feel when you think about the category in which you don't have margin?

3. Read the following passages: Matthew 8:23 – 27, Matthew 9:18 – 22, Mark 1:32 – 35
 - A) How do you see margin exhibited in Jesus' life?
 - B) What does margin allow him to do?
4. Are any of the four idiot lights flashing in your life?